

81291

SUPPLEMENT

SOURCE US Naval Officer

Anticipating that the conference would probably terminate about the 25th of April, I decided to leave Moscow a week prior to that time, and made application for air transportation to Tiflis on 18 April. However, during the evening of 17 April, I was informed that the flight scheduled for the following morning had been cancelled. At about 1000, 18 April, I had a Soviet employee of the US Embassy call the airfield to ascertain the time of departure of the "cancelled" flight. The answer was that the plane had taken off at the scheduled time of 0730. The travel manager of Intourist, being so informed by me, agreed that he had been misinformed, but guaranteed that I would get off on the next transportation. This same gentleman depicted for me the uncomfortable traveling conditions and hotel accommodations I was likely to encounter in Turkey and suggested that I travel to the United States by some other route.

Note: A member of the US Embassy, who completed a round trip to Tiflis and Erivan during February 1947, has submitted in a report to the State Department, dated 10 March 1947, an excellent narrative. Therefore, I shall not attempt to discuss

CLASSIFICATION

[illegible]

CONFIDENTIAL

aspects of my own trip which are so well covered in that report, but shall limit myself to corollary information.

The plane, a DC-3 fitted out in the USSR, took off with a full load from the Vnukovo airport at 0720, Saturday, 19 April, and flew directly south coming out over the Black Sea at Tuapse, then skirted the shore line to land at the small town of Adler at 1250 for refueling. From Adler, a flight of 50 minutes brought us to the second largest city of the Georgian Republic, Kutaisi, an unscheduled stop made for the purpose of dropping off two passengers. Arriving at the Tiflis airport, I waited several minutes for the arrival of the Intourist interpreter who came in a car borrowed from some other organization for the occasion. During the uncomfortable drive into town, we passed a group of German POW's, numbering about 200, and a group of Japanese POW's, somewhat smaller in number. Both of these groups appeared to be well fed and in remarkably good humor; they were engaged in repair work on the city's streetcar lines and were being guarded in a very casual manner.

After getting settled at the very comfortable Orient Hotel, I inquired as to the trains crossing the Turkish frontier and received the information that the schedule called for but two trains weekly -- on Thursday and Saturday. I expressed surprise that the weekday schedule should be on Thursday, and not on Wednesday, and I was reassured on that point. Having several days to wait, I decided to spend two days in Tiflis and then go by rail to Erivan in Soviet Armenia, leaving that place in time to catch the border train from Leninakan. The two days spent in Tiflis were devoted to walking the streets, visiting the market places, driving in the environs, attempting to engage the local populace in conversation, and in attending a performance of the ballet DON QUIXOTE at the local opera house. The overall impressions received parallel very closely those brought out in the aforementioned State Department report.

I left Tiflis for Erivan by train at 1600 on 21 April, efforts to obtain air transportation having been unsuccessful. To my surprise, I found that the lower berth of the two-passenger compartment was occupied by a woman with her five-year old son and year-old infant, making for crowded conditions, what with pantie-wetings, etc. The much harassed mother was the wife of an Armenian doctor and was returning to Erivan from a visit in Tiflis; she had had no previous dealings with foreigners and evinced a great deal of intelligent interest in the American way of life as depicted in a copy of AMERIKA which I lent her. Until the hour of retiring, I spent most of the time in the corridor of the train, chatting with other travelers and hearing about the Armenian lands which the Turks had stolen. None of the passengers had heard about the "Voice of America" broadcasts but were anxious to know whether they were propaganda, or news and entertainment. I found that one of the passengers and I had a common acquaintance, his "very best friend," which called for some cognac but which he failed to uncover, much to my concealed relief and his profuse apologies.

Upon arrival in Erivan at 0800, 22 April, I was met by a very persistent Intourist interpreter whose first question was, "Is Deanna Durbin really dead?" Having assured him that such was not the case, he drew her picture from his pocket and addressed it in dulcet tones, confessing that she was the only girl he would ever love and requesting, if I should ever meet her, that I tell his beloved about the "lonely Armenian youth who would always be her slave." Having exhausted this topic, we proceeded to the hotel and I asked him to verify the departure time from Leninakan of the frontier train scheduled to leave on Wednesday. He returned with the information that the date was Wednesday and not Thursday, as I had been informed in Tiflis. It therefore behooved me to leave Erivan that same evening, which I did at

guide for only several
- 2 -
that he valued friend-
or me to pay the bill it was well

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

It therefore behooved me to leave Erivan that same evening, which I did at 2200; up to that hour, I had succeeded in shaking my guide for only several minutes at a time. In spite of his frequent protestations that he valued friendship above all else, when the time came for me to pay the bill it was well padded.

Enroute to Leninakan, I occupied a compartment with two Armenian girls and an elderly engineer. Upon learning that I was an American, the question of Miss Durbin came up again, the lost Armenian lands were discussed, newspapers and magazines were exchanged, and we became quite chummy, being joined by several other passengers. About an hour out of Erivan, a very sour-faced MVD officer entered the coupe and demanded to know who the Leninakan-bound passenger was. After examining my documents, he left, accompanied by the non-occupants of the coupe. After an interval of approximately another hour, the same procedure was repeated--this time by a female MVD officer; no further conversation took place.

Upon disembarking at Leninakan the following morning at 0645, my documents were again checked and I was taken to the local Intourist Hotel in a Studebaker truck. ~~The place~~ to which I was assigned was very primitive; the previous occupants had expressed their views of the hotel by somewhat obscene inscriptions on the locker doors and other woodwork. Leninakan is a small town, built around a large open square; the buildings were low, almost entirely of stone and mud, and in a ~~bad state~~ of disrepair. There were few shops; none were well stocked and ~~none had~~ "luxury" items. The open-air market, however, had a good supply of ~~food products at prices about~~ equivalent to those in Tiflis and Erivan. The people looked poor, and the effects of malaria were evident in most of them. I wandered into the post office to escape the group of curious boys who followed me about town, and found it to be an excellent spot to observe a cross-section of the population. Several groups of foreign Armenians came in to send wires and letters to friends abroad, but all attempts to engage them in conversation failed. The number of uniformed visitors to the post office was indicative of the rather high percentage of military personnel about town.

At about 1300, I was bundled into the Studebaker truck and escorted to the rather fancy "Waiting Room for Government Officials." My passport was requested, and I did not see it again until it was delivered to me by Turkish officials after crossing the border. Customs cleared my baggage without inspection, although I had no "laissez passer" and the currency control officer assisted me in telegraphing my remaining rubles to Moscow. Then accompanied by the immigration, custom, and frontier ~~guards and two army of-~~ ficers, I boarded the Deisel-powered rail car which ~~got under way immedi-~~ ately, and proceeded to the transfer point on Soviet territory where the Turkish train had just arrived. A returning Soviet official, ~~together~~ with his wife and child, transferred from the Turkish train to the rail ~~car~~, and I did the reverse. Several Soviet guards maintained continuous watch during the transfer of passengers and the few mail sacks, the latter being very thoroughly handled by at least two officials; it would have been impossible for the transfer of any unauthorized persons or material to have taken place. When the transfer had been completed, the Soviet guards boarded the Turkish train and remained with it until the train was turned over to the Turks at the border which was the mid-point of a bridge crossing the Aras River.

MILITARY AND ALLIED INTELLIGENCE

(1) Airfields. Flying close to the ~~north coast of the~~ Black Sea at a distance of several miles to the east of Sochi, probably ~~at the town of~~ Khosta, I sighted a concrete landing strip, running north and south, about

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

4000 feet long. No planes were seen on this strip, nor on the adjacent countryside. At the town of Adler, we landed on a similar strip, possibly 500 feet longer. The plane was serviced here and was given a routine inspection. There were no buildings other than several small shacks, which apparently served as the operations and passenger offices for this field. No opportunity was provided to visit these. One other DC-3 was seen parked here. Approaching the town of Kutaisi, two parallel strips were seen heading east and west. These were of concrete, about 6000 feet long; one was apparently the military airfield located about three miles from the other strip, the latter strip being reserved for commercial aircraft. The military field was edged with several buildings: probably hangars, repair shops, radio, and operational establishments. In addition to several DC-3 type aircraft, I counted 63 conventional single-seat fighters parked near the landing strip. Our plane landed on the commercial strip for the purpose of discharging two special passengers, who were taken to one of the apartment buildings by a passenger bus. The plane was not serviced here and left immediately for Tiflis. Approaching Tiflis, I sighted a concrete strip similar to the one seen at Kutaisi. In overflying this strip, I recognized it as part of the military field and a rapid estimate showed about 70 fighters of the conventional type parked there. As in the case of the aforementioned fields, no bombing aircraft were seen, nor were any large gasoline dumps evident. Our plane landed at the commercial field which had no runways, the landing being made on a surprisingly smooth, natural field. Tiflis being the terminus for the flight, we taxied directly to the terminal building which was very neat and well-administered. While waiting for transportation to town, I noticed the posted schedules which covered all the major cities in Soviet Georgia and Armenia.

In approaching Erivan by rail, we passed an airfield about five miles north of the city. Unfortunately, the time for observation was extremely limited, but a rough estimate would be that it is a military airfield on which between 30 and 40 conventional type fighters were parked, in addition to several miscellaneous training aircraft, and three or four of the DC-3 type. Conversation with a Soviet aviator gave me the impression that there were several more fields somewhat farther to the east on which their heavier planes were based. No extensive operations were seen.

(2) Military and Troop Concentration. No concentrations of troops were noted. In the city of Tiflis there seemed to be an inordinate number of officers and enlisted men bearing tank and aviation insignia. They seemed, for the most part, not to be Georgians and presented the appearance of first-line, combat-experienced soldiers. Their manner was carefree and gave no indication of either having been on recent maneuvers or preparing for any immediate operations. Loaded on flat cars at the Tiflis station, I sighted approximately 14 light tanks. There was no indication of their destination. The only possible concentration of troops was noticed in the area between Leninakan and the Soviet-Turk border, but the number seemed, if anything, less than the requirements would indicate. The Soviet border line was a high barbed wire fence, extending in either direction as far as I could see. Between this fence and a similar fence on the Turkish border was a plowed area on either side of the narrow Aras River. Information from the Soviets, later corroborated by the Turks, indicates that this system of fences separated by a plowed strip extends from the Black Sea to the Iranian frontier, and that this "no man's land" is kept freshly plowed for the purposes of detection of border crossers. No fortifications were seen on either side of the border and, according to the Turks, no permanent fortifications exist along the Soviet line, except for a coastal battery, located at Batum, controlling the sea and land approaches to that city. The Turks also state that the Soviets maintain approximately 200 patrol points along the frontier, each of which is matched by a Turkish station. According to the Soviets, no border incidents have taken place during the past year. This information was also given to me by the Turks.

CONFIDENTIAL

INDUSTRIAL INTELLIGENCE

About fifteen miles south of Tiflis and about four miles to the west of the railroad line, I sighted a large industrial establishment and remarked about it to a fellow-passenger whom I had engaged in conversation just after leaving Tiflis. He volunteered the information that this was a new metallurgical plant of tremendous size; that a surrounding city had been built to house the workers; that **there was plenty of hydroelectric power available, but that** he did not know what **types of metals or ores were handled. From the clouds** of smoke rising from ~~the area~~ ^{would hazard}, based on the presumption that hydroelectric power was plentiful, that metal refining was the purpose of this establishment.

SOCIOLOGICAL INTELLIGENCE

Information was obtained at Erivan that some 60,000 Armenians from Greece, Syria, and Lebanon had been repatriated and that some 16,000 of these had been settled around Erivan. With considerable pride, my guide showed me the housing project for these enlightened repatriates. I was not impressed, since the project would only house about 7,000 people, even by Russian standards, and the project was still in its initial stage. When I suggested to my guide that I should like to talk to some of these people, he discouraged me by stating that we would have no common tongue and that he himself did not feel as though he could interpret sufficiently well. His defensive mechanism then got into high gear, and he told me at length about the unbounded gratitude of these poor folk who had, at last, returned to their homeland.

BORDER CONTROL INTELLIGENCE

Every effort is made by the Soviet to maintain the security of the border near Leninakan. A biweekly Turkish train enters on Soviet territory and is boarded by Soviet troops and the other customs and immigration officials. After a thorough inspection, both paper and physical, the train proceeds under guard to the point of transfer about 4 kilometers inside Soviet territory. It then awaits the arrival of the Soviet border Diesel-powered railway car. The Soviet-bound passengers and mail then leave the Turk train after which it is again inspected. The Turkish-bound passengers and mail are then transferred from the Soviet car to the Turkish train, each package of mail being handled by at least two people. The Turkish train then is permitted to proceed toward the Turkish border with Soviet guards at all points of access to the interior of the train. At the border, the train is turned over to the Turkish officials after a final inspection by the Soviet guards. They then leave the train. Between the transfer location and the border, there are Soviet soldiers placed at intervals to observe the passing of the train.

RAILROADS

While flying along the northern shore of the Black Sea, I saw a single-track line extending eastward from Tuapse, following the contour of the shore as far as Adler at which point the plane flew inland. The line seemed to be in operation with all bridges intact; although no moving trains were sighted, some locomotives and cars were seen.

CONFIDENTIAL